

The Blizzard of 1978

By Scott Nacey, KK6IK



*Scene from Route 128 in (or near) Wellesley on Feb 10, 1978
source: Wellesley archives*

The Wellesley Amateur Radio Society (WARS) also played important, but undocumented but important role in one of the 1970s most remembered events.

According to Wikipedia:

The **Northeastern United States blizzard of 1978** was a catastrophic, historic [nor'easter](#) that struck [New England](#), [New Jersey](#), [Pennsylvania](#), and the [New York metropolitan area](#). The **Blizzard of '78** formed on Sunday, February 5, 1978 and broke up on February 7. ... Snow fell mostly from Monday morning, February 6 to the evening of Tuesday, February 7. [Connecticut](#), [Rhode Island](#), and [Massachusetts](#) were hit especially hard by this storm.

[Boston](#) received a record-breaking 27.1 inches (69 cm) of snow; [Providence](#) also broke a record with 27.6 inches (70 cm)... Nearly all economic activity was disrupted in the worst-hit areas. The storm killed about 100 people in the Northeast and injured about 4,500. It caused more than US\$520 million (US\$2.51 billion in 2024 terms) in damage.

Wellesley and Eastern Massachusetts were hit hard by the blizzard resulting in hundreds of cars and their drivers stranded on Route 128, town services shut down and Newton Wellesley Hospital was

absent of staff if they could not travel. For us school age kids, this was a fabulous and very long “snow day”, in fact, it became a 7 day “snow day”.

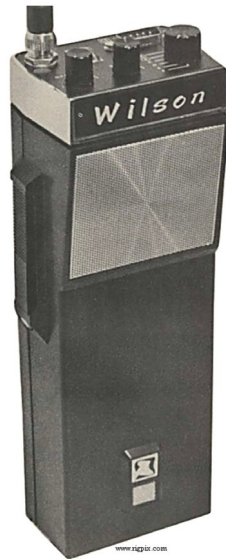
But for those of us who were ham operators, we went to work!

WARS members with HT’s were rapidly called in to action to provide wide-area communications to support emergency deliveries and hospital staffing. On the evening of February 6 (day one of the storm) and throughout the week, I reported to the old Massachusetts DPW building at the junction of Routes 9 and 128, a cavernous building used to house storage and repair facilities for DPW vehicles and Massachusetts National Guard trucks.

WARS High Schoolers like me were assigned to all hours of the day and night to ride in National Guard vehicles that were able to move through the huge snow drifts. Why? Well, we learned the National Guard communications at that time were based on a Korean War vintage Galvin (early Motorola) Handi-Talkies. Needless to say, these old, battery powered, vacuum tube-based HT’s didn’t work. The National Guard commanders and soldiers quickly figured out that a kid with a 2-meter HT could reliably communicate throughout all of Eastern Massachusetts with no issues and the ham-run radio nets were extremely efficient. I had my first HT at that time, a 2-watt Wilson 1402SM that I had saved up for months to buy. With these tools we became very popular. My parents wondered what I was doing as I disappeared until early mornings – then did it again each day.



*A typical Massachusetts National Guard Issue “HT” in 1978 – Galvin SCR-536 – not useful
source: RigPix*



*Scott, WAIYOJ's ham HT in 1978 – Wilson 1402SM – useful
source: RigPix*

When deployed, I rode in 2-½ ton trucks with Guard soldiers and experienced a completely empty, closed Route 128 as we drove North in the South lane (wrong way! but that was okay), to pick up doctors and nurses for Newton Wellesley Hospital and deliver emergency food on streets blocked by 4-5 feet of snow. These trucks could go through virtually anything – and we had fun while doing it!



*Massachusetts National Guard 2 ½ ton trucks in Boston, 1978 – these could go through anything
source: Massachusetts Archive*

If you meet any of our older club members from the 1970s, ask them what they did during the Blizzard of 1978. You may hear some great stories!